

# ***Writing 20: Writing About Religion & Politics***

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**Section 58** T/Th 11:40 – 12:55

**Location** 216 Friedl Building

**Office Hours** W 1:00 – 3:00 and by appointment

Welcome to Duke and to Writing 20! I'm excited to meet each of you and excited about our work together this semester. I look forward to seeing you grow as writers and intellectuals, and I also look forward to getting to know you better.

## **Purpose**

As the only course taken by all undergraduates, Writing 20 claims a unique importance in Duke's curriculum. This should tell you something about the value Duke places on academic writing. All Duke freshmen will take this course. While each section of Writing 20 is different, all instructors of Writing 20 uphold a common set of goals and practices (see below). Writing 20 offers you a set of academic tools that will prepare you for courses at Duke. It will introduce you to practices of reading, thinking, writing, and criticism that you will be expected to implement in other classes. And with any luck, Writing 20 will demonstrate to you the rewards of involving yourself in academic conversations.

## **Course Description**

Given both the omnipresent presidential election coverage and my own interest in religion and politics, I thought this semester would be an ideal time to offer a writing seminar about religion and politics. We will read authors from a variety of cultural locations and political orientations, and you will write essays that provide historical perspective on contemporary events. But I should say at the outset that my aim is not to get you to agree with any particular political viewpoint. Because this is a writing course, the goal of this course is to help you become a stronger reader, writer, and critic. This class will not advocate one particular political or religious viewpoint, nor will I ask you to defend your own political or religious persuasions. Our focus will be on the ways writing about religion & politics takes shape, and how academic writing can offer important advantages in understanding these subjects. In particular, I believe academic writers' emphases on historical perspective, measured rhetoric, well-chosen evidence, and carefully constructed arguments help us avoid the pettiness and shallowness that characterize much of our public discourse. As a writing teacher, I'm interested in helping you learn to deploy these tools in order to produce sophisticated and readable prose.

I've designed this course around a series of writing assignments (described below). In order to facilitate those projects, I have selected reading about two prominent themes: the role of African-American religious movements and white conservative evangelicals in American politics. I chose these themes because they are prominent in this year's presidential race, and because focusing on two themes allows us to probe more deeply than if we tried to cover everything. There are, of course, other possibilities to explore, and if you're interested in, say, the role of Catholics in American politics, you'll have an opportunity to design a research project around that interest. But for the first two-thirds of the course, we'll look closely at how and why black churches and white evangelicals have involved themselves in American politics. I'm excited to see where our investigation takes us!

## **Writing Projects and Course Trajectory**

This course is organized around the writing projects detailed below, so read this section carefully. The main writing projects for this course are divided into two categories: blog entries and essays. Blog entries (which include posts and comments) will always be due on Mondays or Tuesdays; essays will always be due on Wednesdays or Thursdays. Though I have divided blog entries and essays into

separate categories, they are not unrelated. Blog entries will serve as rough drafts of your essays, either directly or indirectly. Likewise, some of your short essays will become “first drafts” of your major essays. Thus, you should think of writing projects as works-in-progress rather than “assignments” to be completed by an assigned date and then forgotten. There are deadlines, of course, and penalties for missing them. But I encourage you to think of each writing project as a building block for the next project.

The blog to which you will be contributing is called “Religion, Politics, and Law,” and it is located at <http://religionpoliticsandlaw.blogspot.com>. Each of you will be enrolled as an author on the blog. Over the course of the semester, you’ll be responsible for making 4 posts running 300-400 words each. These posts will invite you to comment on articles about religion and politics, drawing on readings and conversations we have in class. In addition to your 4 posts, you’ll be responsible for writing at least 8 comments on other posts throughout the semester. This means, beginning in the second week of the course, you’ll have to write either a post or a comment on the blog every week, excepting the weeks of Fall Break and Thanksgiving.

The essays include 5 short essays and 2 major essays. The first three short essays ask you to deploy writing moves described in Joseph Harris’s book *Rewriting*, which we’ll read together. You’ll choose one of those essays to expand into your first major essay. After fall break, you’ll write two more short “essays:” a research proposal and annotated bibliography. You will use these essays to develop and hone a research topic, and that topic will serve as the basis for your second major essay. Both major essays will be “workshopped” in class; you will read your peers’ first drafts and offer both written and oral feedback. Revising in response to the feedback you receive from your peers and from me is a critical portion of major essays, and your thoughtfulness in revision and critique will play a role in your evaluation.

Don’t worry about memorizing all these details – I will provide prompts for every assignment in class. By the end of this course, you will have practiced a variety of writing skills—including researching, drafting, workshopping, revising, and editing—and undertaken two major projects. You will emerge from this course with a confidence in your ability to take on a variety of writing and research projects. And, if all goes well, you will develop an appreciation for the intellectual work that goes into academic writing. I look forward to our semester together!

### **Goals & Practices**

While many of the specific features of academic writing vary from discipline to discipline, students in all sections of Writing 20 learn how to:

- *Engage with the work of others*
- *Articulate a position*
- *Situate their writing within specific contexts*

The actual labor of producing a written academic argument usually involves taking a text through several drafts. In developing their work-in-progress, students in all sections of Writing 20 practice:

- *Researching*
- *Workshopping*
- *Revising*
- *Editing*

Please see <http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/writing20/students/goals.html> for more explanation of these goals & practices.

## Course Objectives

In addition to the universal Writing 20 goals outlined above, there are several specific objectives I would like to help each of you pursue in our class:

- Begin to read texts with “double vision” (this means you will start to analyze the delivery and presentation of ideas, as well as the content)
- Identify your individual strengths and areas for improvement as a writer
- Develop and/or refine a writing process that works for you
- Heighten your self-confidence as a writer
- Develop your ability to write for a public audience (primarily on the blog)
- Enhance your ability to give and receive constructive feedback (both on the blog and in your workshop critiques)
- Have fun with writing!

## Assignments and Grading

I assign letter grades to essays. There will be 5 short essays and 2 major essays. If you turn in a late draft for one of the major essays, your grade on that major essay will drop one letter for each day late. Late short essays will be penalized one partial step (i.e. A to A-) for each day late. (I consider essays 1 day late as soon as the deadline passes.) I may grant extensions for extenuating circumstances if you request an extension at least 24 hours prior to the due date.

I will write a short email to you after each blog post offering some comments on the strengths and weaknesses of that post. When I assign mid-term grades during the second week of October, I'll send you your mid-term grade for blog posts *and* comments, along with some feedback.

Your final grade for this course will reflect the quality of your writing as well as the quality of your course participation. Thus, your reflections on the common reading, your critical responses to your peers' writing, and your active participation in class discussions will all factor into your grade for the course. Twice during the semester (at midterm and at the end), I will provide you with a summative evaluation of your performance on blog posts, workshop critiques, and class involvement.

Grade Breakdown:

25% - Short Essays (Es)

15% - Final Draft of First Major Essay (ME1)

20% - Final Draft of Second Major Essay (ME2)

5% - Student Panels

15% - Blog Posts & Comments

10% - Workshop Critiques (WCs)

10% - Quality of Class Involvement (including participation in discussions, group work, workshops, and conferences; quality of in-class writing; and timeliness in turning in all assignments and drafts)

## Format of Written Work

Written work should be typed in a standard word processing program (preferably MS Word) and double-spaced. I expect you to *edit* and *proofread* all written work (even first drafts!). Drafts that contain excessive typos, misspellings, or grammar mistakes will be returned to the author for correction before I offer comments. Please give each piece of writing an **original title**, use **page numbers** on multi-page assignments, and include your name, assignment, and the due date in a **header** on the first page. Save the assignment using the following format: last name – due date.doc (e.g. Dowland – 8.26.08.doc). All work should be **posted** on the class Blackboard site under “Assignments” (unless otherwise noted). In addition, you should **always print** a copy of your work and bring it to class on the due date.

Note: These formatting guidelines apply to blog posts and comments as well, with the following exceptions: you do not need to paginate, to use a header, or to post a Word file of your entry on the Blackboard site. You also do not need to provide an original title for comments (though you should for your posts!). You do not need to bring hard copies of blog entries to class.

### **Absence Policy**

I expect you to attend all scheduled class meetings, but I understand that conflicts inevitably arise. I allow each student three absences without penalty. (One exception: absences on days when your writing is to be discussed in a seminar workshop or a peer-critique group will be penalized.) Each absence after the third—regardless of the reason—will result in a *partial-step drop* in your *final course grade* (e.g. an A- becomes a B+, a B becomes a B-, and so on). If severe illness or an emergency causes you to miss more than three class meetings, it is your responsibility to discuss the situation with me. Otherwise, you are wholly responsible for ensuring you miss no more than three class meetings (and preferably fewer!). Because of the stiff penalty for missing more than three classes, I suggest you reserve your absences for illness, nonnegotiable engagements away from campus, and true emergencies. Missing class does not excuse you from learning what happened that day, and all assignments must be submitted on time unless you have cleared an alternate due date with the instructor *in advance*. Two tardies (more than 5 minutes late to class) constitute an absence. Missing a scheduled conference with me also counts as an absence.

Why the stringent attendance policy? It is important for you to be in class. Writing 20 operates as a seminar, where each participant's contributions help us learn together. Your peers depend on you for analysis of the texts we read, critiques of their writing, and development of an academic community.

### **Conferences**

I love to meet with students outside of class. One-on-one conferences offer the advantage of discussion about your writing, and often some of the best revision ideas emerge out of these conferences. Please feel free to schedule a conference with me *whenever* you want to discuss a writing project, course readings, or other academic matters. I plan to hold office hours on Wednesdays from 1:00 – 3:00, but I am available to meet at many other times. The best way to set up an appointment is to email me.

You must schedule a one-on-one conference with me during the week after you submit the first draft of ME1; I will distribute a sign-up sheet for conferences during class time. These conferences will be rather brief (15 minutes), and they will focus on how to revise your essay before submitting a second draft.

### **Expectations**

I expect you to be considerate of others—other classmates, other historical figures, other political viewpoints, and other religious traditions—in both written work and class discussion. While I expect and encourage differences of opinion, intellectual disagreements should not provoke personal attacks. All of us should feel comfortable articulating our own points of view in this course. I expect you to take positions in this class, but I also expect you to respect—and learn from—the positions of others.

NOTE: Students with learning or other disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class should visit <http://www.aas.duke.edu/trinity/t-reqs/ld.html> to learn about Duke's policies concerning academic accommodations. If you anticipate a need for accommodations due to disability, please contact me as early in the semester as possible. All communication about disabilities will be kept confidential.

## **Plagiarism & Academic Honesty**

Knowingly presenting someone else's work as your own constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism is one of the most serious offenses in academia because it undermines the community of integrity that supports a scholarly community. As such, the penalties for plagiarism are harsh. All instances of cheating and plagiarism will be referred to the Duke University Undergraduate Judicial Board (minor, first-time offenses may be settled by faculty-student resolution), and serious plagiarism will result in failure of the course. See [http://judicial.studentaffairs.duke.edu/policies/policy\\_list/academic\\_dishonesty.html](http://judicial.studentaffairs.duke.edu/policies/policy_list/academic_dishonesty.html) for more details. If you have questions about citing sources or what constitutes plagiarism, visit <http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/> and <http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism/>.

I expect each student to uphold the Duke Community Standard. You may read it here: <http://www.duke.edu/web/HonorCouncil/communitystandard.html>

## **Writing Studio**

The writing studio is a great resource offered to Duke students. You can schedule an appointment at any stage of the writing process, whether you're struggling to come up with an idea for a project or polishing a final draft. You can visit the Writing Studio in the Academic Advising Center during the day, at Lilly Library during the evenings, and at Perkins Library location at various hours. You may also make use of the Writing Studio's e-tutor program. Visit the Writing Studio's website (<http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/>) to find out how to schedule an appointment and to access the studio's online resources.

## **Required Textbooks**

There are three required textbooks; all of them are available in the university bookstore.

Chappell, David. *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

Harris, Joseph. *Rewriting: Doing Things With Texts*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2006.

Martin, William. *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Broadway, 2005.

Other readings will be available under "course documents" on Blackboard (<http://courses.duke.edu>).

**A Final Note:** Please don't hesitate to talk to me about *any* issues related to the course. If you have questions or concerns about readings, assignments, feedback, or class activities, I hope you'll ask me. That's what I'm here for! I look forward to getting to know each of you better over the course of this term, and I hope our conversations both in and out of class will facilitate our intellectual pursuits.

## Schedule

Note: This schedule may change somewhat during the semester. All changes will be mentioned in class and announced via email. Readings marked (Bb) can be found under the “course documents” section of our Blackboard site. All assignments must be posted to Blackboard by the time they are due. (Exception: Blog posts should be posted directly to the blog and do not need to be re-posted on the Blackboard site.) **Please bring hard copies of all assignments and reading materials to class.**

Tuesday, August 26 – Introductions

Thursday, August 28 – “They Say/I Say,” Introduction (Bb); bring Op-Ed with you to class

Tuesday, September 2 – Kurtz, “Context, You Say?” (Bb); Sanneh, “Project Trinity” (Bb); Obama, “Chicago” (Bb)

Thursday, September 4 – FitzGerald, “The New Evangelicals” (Bb); Jackson and Perkins, “Personal Faith, Public Policy” (Bb)

Tuesday, September 9 – Harris, ch. 1 (Coming to Terms)

Thursday, September 11 – **E1 due** (large group workshop)

Tuesday, September 16 – Chappell, 1-8, 44-66

Thursday, September 18 – Martin, 1-23, 47-73

Tuesday, September 23 – Chappell, 67-86; Harris, ch. 2 (Forwarding)

Thursday, September 25 – **E2 due** (large group workshop)

Tuesday, September 30 – Martin, 168-190; Harris, ch. 3 (Countering)

Thursday, October 2 – **E3 due** (large group workshop)

Tuesday, October 7 – Harris, ch. 5 (Revising); Dowland, “Family Values” (Bb)

Thursday, October 9 – **ME1.d1 Due**

Tuesday, October 14 – NO CLASS – Fall Break

Thursday, October 16 – **WCs Due**; Small Group Workshops

Tuesday, October 21 – NO CLASS – Conferences with Instructor (bring revision plan)

Thursday, October 23 – **ME1.d2 Due**

Tuesday, October 28 – Chappell, 87-104; Martin, 191-220

**\*\*Wed, October 29\*\* – E4 (research proposals) due at noon**

Thursday, October 30 – Library Instruction (class meets in Lilly Library)

Tuesday, November 4 – Elevator Speech Activity (no reading)

Thursday, November 6 – **E5 (annotated bibliography) due**

Tuesday, November 11 – Religion and Politics in the 2008 election (no reading)

Thursday, November 13 – **ME2.d1 due**

Tuesday, November 18 – Chappell, 179-193; Martin 371-385

Thursday, November 20 – **WCs due**; Small Group Workshops

Tuesday, November 25 – NO CLASS – **ME2.d2 due at class time**

Thursday, November 27 – NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING

Tuesday, December 2 – Student Panels

Thursday, December 4 – Student Panels

**\*\*Tuesday, December 9\*\* – ME2.d3 due at 9:00 am**